

I. Preface

The Administration on Aging and the Aging Network composed of State and Area Agencies on Aging, Native American Tribal Organizations, service providers and educational institutions have the legislative mandate to advocate on behalf of older persons and to work in cooperation with other Federal and State programs to provide needed services. The Administration on Aging has joined in partnership with the Kansas Department on Aging to develop a new, updated disaster guide for use by State and Area Agencies on Aging and Native American Tribal Organizations to better respond to the needs of older disaster victims.

Older persons are among the most vulnerable members of American society. When disasters occur, they will be the most likely to suffer from the direct impact of nature's force. They are among the most likely to have physical or mental impairments that limit their ability to respond or to seek help. Because of some common characteristics, they will be the slowest to request assistance and will often decline assistance because they do not want to deny others of needed services or because of a misunderstanding of the nature of disaster services. They are repelled by any assistance that seems to be "welfare". Because they no longer have long working years ahead of them, older persons are less likely to have the ability to recover from the economic impact of a natural disaster. Without economic support, compounded by physical and mental impairments which may limit their ability to recover, older persons are much more likely to become totally dependent and to suffer institutionalization. It is in the interests of older persons and our society to assure older persons receive the assistance necessary to assure that they at least receive the benefits that all persons are afforded after a disaster.

During the 1970's, the Administration on Aging made major efforts to prepare the aging network to respond to the special needs of older disaster victims. National strategies were developed and orientation sessions held. An interagency agreement was negotiated between the Administration on Aging and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (then the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration) which dealt with mutual expectations relative to program and fiscal activity.

Building on the experiences gained during that period, and using the material and expertise developed by the aging network in responding to recent hurricanes, floods and the California earthquake, this new and updated disaster guide for state and area agencies on aging has been developed.

This manual reflects the commitment of the Administration on Aging to engage in an on-going program of training and technical assistance to assure continuing development of the aging network's capacity to serve older disaster victims.